

Recreational Fishing Freshwater Trust Expenditure Committee
Outcomes - Meeting 26, 28 November 2006

Apologies

Max Graham, Bryan Van der Walt

Confirmation of outcomes from previous RFFTEC meeting

The Committee accepted the draft outcomes as a true and accurate record of discussions from the 25^h RFFTEC meeting, held 22 August 2006. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** Robert Bell. **Carried**

Action items from previous meeting

1. The status of issues arising from the previous meeting are summarised at the back of the agenda paper. The Director, Wild Harvest Fisheries Management confirmed there are no plans to sell the Dutton or Gaden trout hatcheries and that the Government will continue to invest in their future operation. The recommendations for changes to fishing regulations have been endorsed by the Seafood Industry Advisory Council and the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing. A final decision on the review is pending.

1. Recreational Fishing Freshwater Trust report (John Diplock - DPI)

The Freshwater Trust financial table was provided at the meeting for the Committee's information. The balance in the Freshwater Trust as at 30 June 2006 was \$636,000. Income to the Freshwater Trust in 2006/07 was \$3,000,000. The Expenditure Committee and ACoRF have supported a total allocation of \$3,348 million for a range of compliance, research, management and education programs to improve recreational fishing in 2006/07. The remaining balance in 2006/07 is \$288,000. A new cost recovery level has been approved based on 48% overheads. This overhead rate is standard with the abalone and rock lobster management programs. All budgets in 2006/07 have been adjusted according to this new level.

2. Update on improvements to the NSW Recreational Fishing Fee system (John Diplock - DPI)

NSW DPI is implementing a pilot program to provide plastic licences for 1 and 3 year licence holders. The initial pilot (commencing at the end of January 07) will be implemented via an electronic payment channel, including a new application to be distributed by agents. The draft application form and plastic licence designs were circulated amongst Committee members. A contractor has been engaged to draft a project brief for a new administration database system. This will improve the monthly reconciliation process and allow for renewals (rather than reminder letters) to be sent to fishers. The Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing has supported the implementation of enhancements for the recreational fishing fee administration system.

3. Review of Habitat Restoration Programs (Milly Hobson / David Harasti - DPI)

Applications for round 5 of the Fish Habitat Grant Program were sent to Committee members out of session and regional Conservation Managers for assessment. Feedback and project rankings were used to develop the priority list for funding, which was presented at the meeting. Members reviewed the habitat grant applications and made the following recommendations regarding project submissions.

Programs Supported

The Committee supported funding of \$9,000 in 2006-07, **to construct a partial width rock ramp fishway next to a concrete causeway in the Gloucester River**, through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** By All. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$6,775 in 2006-07, **to revegetate approximately 1km of riverbank of the Murrumbidgee River and snag placement near Hay**, through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** By All. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$1,195 in 2006-07, **to revegetate approximately 2km of riverbank of the MacIntyre River including weed removal and snag placement, near Yetman** (fish habitat rehabilitation components of the program) through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** By All. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$30,000 in 2006-07, **to provide fish passage on the Lower Oxley River above a road crossing near Murwillumbah**, through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** By All. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$9,000 in 2006-07, **to revegetate approximately 300m of creek bank of Broughton Creek and riparian fencing, weed removal, erosion protection works and snag placement near Gerringong**, through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** By All. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$15,420 in 2006-07, **to revegetate approximately 600m of riverbank of the Little Plains River including riparian fencing, weed control and wetland rehabilitation near Craigee**, through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** By All. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$29,950 in 2006-07, **to revegetate approximately 500m of creek bank of South Creek including weed control, wetland rehabilitation, fish passage works, erosion control works and snag placement near St Mary's**, through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** By All. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$9,910 in 2006-07, **to revegetate approximately 200m of creek bank of Mullet Creek including riparian fencing, weed control and erosion control works near Wollongong**, through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** By All. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$12,500 in 2006-07, **to provide fish passage on the Richmond River at Jabour Weir near Casino**, through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** By All. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$2,000 in 2006-07, **to revegetate approximately 2km of foreshore of Chaffey and Split Rock dams and public reserves along the Namoi and Peel Rivers**, (subject to advice and guidance from DPI Conservation staff on site suitability) through the existing Habitat Grants Program. **Moved:** Richard Ping Kee. **Seconded:** Ian Ward. **Carried.**

Programs Not Supported

The Committee did not support funding of \$30,000 in 2006-07 **to construct a farm dam for breeding fish near the Hunter River Moved: Brian Hale Seconded: Debbie Lennon. Carried.**

The Committee did not support funding of \$22,000 in 2006-07 **to revegetate approximately 500 metres of Maguires Creek including weed removal and bank erosion control near Alstonville Moved: Rodney Tonkin. Seconded: Kevin McKinnon. Carried.**

The Committee did not support funding of \$30,000 in 2006-07 **to revegetate approximately 2km of riverbank of the Lachlan River including weed removal, erosion control and fish passage works, near Forbes.** It was requested that the application be re-submitted with a revised budget, excluding the dredging component of the application. **Moved: Rodney Tonkin. Seconded: Richard Ping Kee. Carried.**

The Committee did not support funding of \$27,431 in 2006-07 **to revegetate approximately 1.5km of Amos Creek including riparian fencing, wetland rehabilitation and erosion control works and snag placement near Pillar Valley Moved: Brian Hale Seconded: By All. Carried.**

NSW DPI noted that the effects of the drought could be contributing to the lack of submissions in recent rounds. NSW DPI will look at a new delivery method in 2007/08 for the Habitat Grant program to make it more accessible to the community. In the interim, NSW DPI will approach fishing clubs and community groups with a view to obtaining further projects for consideration, to ensure expenditure of the remaining \$75,000 during the 2006/07 financial year. A decision on these projects will be sought from the Committee out of session. Mr Rodney Tonkin noted the federal Environmental Trust as a possible additional source of funding for habitat grant projects. Summary tables for rounds 1-4 were also presented.

4. Bass production program at Port Stephens Fisheries Centre (Luke Cheviot – DPI)

Mr Luke Cheviot provided an overview of the intensive and extensive methods applied for the breeding of Australian bass at the Port Stephens Fisheries Centre (PSFC). The breeding program is made possible by funding from the Freshwater Trust which allows employment of one full-time hatchery technician at the hatchery. The technician is responsible for co-ordinating broodstock collection, hormone induction, maintaining the various culture systems, monitoring fish health and husbandry, water quality analysis, harvesting, collecting specimens (blood letting) and co-ordinating the stocking. There has been a marked increase in the number of bass stocked in freshwater impoundments since the creation of the Trust funded Fisheries Technician position. Trust funds have also been used for construction of greenhouse covers on the plastic-lined ponds at PSFC. The greenhouses have allowed increased, reliable production of bass fingerlings during winter.

Hatchery operations have been revised since the Nodavirus issue in 2004. This includes the application of rigorous hygiene protocols, such as foot baths, iodine hand sprays and use of sterilised sea water. An ozone unit has also been installed for disinfection of eggs. All Nodavirus investigation is conducted at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute, using Bass specific PCR and histopathology testing methods. No species of fish at the PSFC have returned a positive result since 2004.

5. Tour of Dutton trout hatchery facility (Peter Selby, Paul Sheather – DPI)

Mr Peter Selby provided a tour of the Dutton complex. Members viewed the earthen ponds for grow out of broodstock and public display. It was noted that fish are transferred from the ponds to the raceways in April / May each year where they are checked and sorted for breeding condition. Those fish that are ready to spawn are removed for egg stripping and returned to the ponds once spawning has been completed. Stock that are no longer required are released into the fishing clinic ponds or recreational fishing impoundments in the region.

Members visited the breeding shed and hatching building, which comprised an incubating system and grow out troughs and tanks. Mr Paul Sheather discussed the planned installation of a re-circulation unit. Fish will be housed inside the hatching shed within two 14,200L fibre glass temperature controlled tanks, which will free-up pond space of remaining stock. The tanks will maintain 300kg of trout broodstock in the months prior to the breeding season (Dec-Mar). A platform will be built outside of the shed to hold the heater/chiller unit. A 1,000 litre poly tank and 14,000 litre storage tank will hold the re-circulated water and Bio balls. Members also viewed the circular ponds used for holding fry and fingerlings and for public display.

6. Current status of effectiveness of stocking program and proposed new freshwater research (Dr Dean Gilligan - DPI)

Recruitment for a replacement for John Pogonoski was finalised and Mr Leo Cameron commenced work on 25 September. Mr Cameron is finalising the report on monitoring of annual spawning migrations of trout in the Snowy Lakes. The results of this research will be presented at the Snowy Lakes strategy meeting in December.

Sampling has commenced for a study investigating factors influencing stocking success in Blowering and Burrinjuck Dams. Age information will be collected from 300 golden and silver perch within each impoundment. The age of fish will then be correlated with conditions within the impoundment at the time of stocking (i.e. temperature, water levels, rainfall, number of fish stocked etc). Once an analysis has been performed it will be possible to predict conditions within each impoundment that will lead to a successful stocking event, resulting in more efficient stocking practices. Results of this study will be presented to RFFTEC at the April budget meeting. If successful, work could be conducted on Murray cod and at other impoundments in NSW in the future. NSW DPI has gained approval from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority to use calcein to batch-mark annual fish stockings. However, final approval is required from the Australia and New Zealand Food Standards Authority before widespread use can begin. A bid has been submitted and, if approved, it is anticipated to use this method to mark all stocked trout as an alternative to fin-clipping

NSW DPI, along with collaborators from Macquarie University and Environment ACT are in the final stages of completing a detailed review of all current knowledge of the Murray crayfish, including its status, biology and the sustainability of the recreational fishery. However, information on the current status of Murray crayfish throughout their entire range remains the most significant knowledge gap for the species. Other knowledge gaps include the habitats and biology of juvenile crayfish, the endemicity of populations in the Lachlan and Macquarie catchments and the impact of river regulation on burrowing behaviour and recruitment. An application will be submitted for consideration at the April meeting aimed at addressing these knowledge gaps, based on the recommendations arising from the review.

Freshwater catfish are on the verge of threatened status in some areas of their range. They have declined significantly in inland waters since the 1970's, whilst remaining relatively common in coastal catchments. Current action now may prevent inland

populations of catfish being listed as a threatened population, and therefore ensure they remain available to recreational fishers. Carp may be implicated in inhibiting or limiting recruitment of catfish. Given the declining populations of carp in many areas, it may be timely to initiate catfish re-stocking. However, data is required on the natural population genetic structure across their range as a precursor to any stocking program. Following this genetic assessment, subsequent development of a network of stocking locations and assessments of an optimum stocking strategy can be undertaken. NSW DPI will develop a catfish research and stocking recovery program for submission at the April meeting.

The importance of freshwater catfish as a freshwater recreational fishing species was acknowledged by the Committee. Mr Richard Ping Kee discussed the possibility of translocating catfish from Copeton dam into the Gwydir River catchment below the dam wall. Cameron Westaway noted that under the Fish Stocking Fisheries Management Strategy, a review of environmental factors may be required before this activity can occur. An application can then be submitted to Dr Gilligan for consideration of genetic impacts.

Action item

That NSW DPI review the requirements for translocating fish under the Fish Stocking Fisheries Management Strategy and report back to Mr Richard Ping Kee

7. Freshwater compliance report (Mr Mathew Richardson - DPI)

Mr Mathew Richardson reported on compliance activities undertaken in inland NSW, between the period November 2005 and October 2006. The presentation included information on enforcement outcomes such as fishers checked and compliance rates significant apprehensions and court results and well as advisory and education activities undertaken. More than 19,000 freshwater anglers were checked with a fishing licence compliance rate of 93%. Major seizures during this period included set lines, fish traps, nets, fish and 1 boat forfeiture offence. 16 high profile and covert operations were conducted across western NSW during this period. These operations targeted freshwater angling, taking and possession of threatened species and enforcement of the general recreational fishing fee. The operations used motor vehicles, vessels, motor bikes and aircraft. A total of 374 Fisheries Officer days were spent on operations over this time.

The Committee sought clarification on the status of trust funded positions around the State and whether trust funded officers were being seconded to other positions within the Department. Mr Richardson advised that the 6 trust funded officer positions in inland NSW were currently filled, although some of these officers may be acting on higher duties.

Action item

That the Compliance Division provides a status report at the next meeting on inland trust funded officers over the past 12 months including budget expenditure for the program and any carry over of funds.

8. Update on the regional fish habitat program (David Harasti - DPI)

The Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitation (AHR) Unit within DPI has obtained a \$1.77M contract with the Namoi Catchment Management Authority, to protect and restore over 50km's of riparian habitat, address up to 11 barriers to fish passage and establish the first demonstration reach within the Namoi catchment, to highlight a variety of rehabilitation and protection activities that can be used to enhance native fish populations. Alison Maclean has commenced work in the Albury office to take up the temporary vacancy created by Nicole McKirdy's absence. Ms Maclean has been playing an integral role in the assessment of development applications and advocating the conservation of freshwater habitats in government and community forums.

An additional Conservation Manager position has been advertised to assist in developing the Wetlands on Farms project. In addition, the AHR Unit has released information material for landholders under the banner of "Fish Friendly Farms" which was developed with the assistance of Freshwater Trust funded conservation staff. A series of workshops and presentations at Field Days and community forums are being held in conjunction with the release of the information material.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been developing a rehabilitation plan for the Tumut River. DPI has been represented on the working group. The local Catchment Management Authority is reluctant to implement the plan at this stage and Snowy Hydro is unwilling to provide funding until the plan is complete. There are no major works being undertaken in the Tumut River at present except for strategic rock work on existing rock areas. Mr Rodney Tonkin expressed discontent on the lack of progress of habitat restoration works within the Tumut River catchment and the continuing negative impacts of water draw-downs on downstream fish habitat. Mr Tonkin sought the involvement of NSW DPI in a meeting with Mr David Harriss, Executive Director, DNR Water Management, with a view to addressing habitat protection issues within this catchment. NSW DPI advised that it would arrange a meeting with DNR Water Management in Albury, the local Conservation Manager, Ms Alison Maclean and the Council of Freshwater Anglers, to discuss this issue.

Action item

That NSW DPI arrange a meeting with Mr David Harriss, Executive Director, Water Management, (DNR) in Albury to discuss habitat protection issues within the Tumut River catchment.

9. Review of new freshwater trust projects (Craig Watson / Cameron Westaway - DPI)

Members of the Committee reviewed seven new freshwater trust funding proposals and made the following recommendations regarding project submissions.

Large grants

Programs Supported

The Committee supported funding of \$23,535 in 2006-07, \$93,538 in 2007-08 and \$96,171 in 2008-09 for a **Fisheries Management Officer (Recreational Fisheries)** to provide additional management services for freshwater recreational fishers. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** Robert Bell. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$9,513 in 2006-07 for **ongoing monitoring of threatened frog populations in the Styx River catchment** (New England region), near sites where trout releases occur. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** Brian Hale. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$8,400 in 2006-07 for **assessing the population status of Booroolong Frog in the upper Murrumbidgee catchment** (Adelong Creek, Gilmore Creek, Goobragandra River and Mannus Creek), near sites where trout releases occur. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin. **Seconded:** Richard Ping Kee. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$50,095 in 2006-07, \$50,427 in 2007-08 and \$52,251 in 2008-09 to **develop a predatory impact model to optimise stocking rates**

of Australian bass in freshwater impoundments Moved: Richard Ping Kee.
Seconded: Brian Hale. **Carried.**

The Committee supported funding of \$41,650 in 2006-07, \$127,954 in 2007-08 and \$127,954 in 2008-09 for the **Rivers Access Program**, to provide long term management of access ways to inland streams for recreational fishers. **Moved:** Rodney Tonkin.
Seconded: Karl Schaerf. **Carried.**

Programs Not Supported

The Committee did not support funding of \$6,426.80 in 2006-07 **to construct a pontoon adjacent to the Lake Talbot boat ramp** for recreational fishing and boating access
Moved: Brian Hale. Seconded: Debbie Lennon. **Carried.**

The Committee acknowledged Penrith Lakes as having great potential as a recreational fishery but did not support funding of \$30,000 in 2006-07, \$29,500 in 2007-08 and \$30,000 in 2008-09 **to develop effective habitat structures and a stocking strategy for the Penrith Lakes system.** **Moved:** Richard Ping Kee. Seconded: Karl Schaerf.
Carried. NSW DPI will approach the Penrith Lakes Development Corporation with a view to developing a more applicable funding application.

General business

Freshwater trust project account reports

Freshwater trust quarterly project account reports were distributed to the Committee at the meeting for consideration out of session.

Meeting reports for trust fund projects

Project managers have compiled reports detailing the status of trust fund projects including activities undertaken and completion of Milestones. A summary of these reports are provided at the back of the agenda for the information of the Committee.

Term of office for RFFTEC members

An Expression of Interest has been advertised to fill upcoming vacancies on the freshwater trust expenditure committee. Current membership for Regions 2, 3, 6 and the AFTA representative will expire in January 2007. Once nominations have been received, the Chair of the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing and relevant Departmental managers will evaluate the submissions and recommend a shortlist of suitable applicants for the Minister's final selection and appointment by Cabinet. However, new membership may not occur before next year's budget meeting. As a result, NSW DPI will seek an extension of the tenure of existing members until the end of April 07, to ensure a quorum for that meeting.

Action item

That NSW DPI seek an extension in the tenure in membership in Regions 2,3, 6 and the AFTA position until the end of April 07, to ensure a quorum for the April budget meeting.

Effects of drought on fish stocks

NSW DPI is identifying a range of possible outcomes of the drought on inland fish populations and options to respond to any incidences that may arise in the future. This includes continual monitoring of water levels in stocked and town water supplies, identification of remnant pool distribution and the development of fish rescue plan. The main arm of the Darling River is considered to be most at risk from the drought. Temporary fishing closures will generally not be supported as fishing is not considered to pose a threat, provided anglers adhere to bag and size limit regulations.

Recreational Angler Award

The Committee sought clarification on the progress of the proposal for a Recreational Angler Award. The release date of the EOI has been postponed until early next year when nominations for the RECFISH recreational angler awards are finalised. Applications will be presented to RFFTEC for consideration at the April budget meeting.

Removal of carp from Wyangala dam

Mr Rodney Tonkin advised that the Council of Freshwater Anglers will make enquiries with two inland commercial carp fishers regarding the potential removal of carp from Wyangala dam. NSW DPI noted that the District Fisheries Officer at Bathurst will need to be notified of any future application to remove carp from Wyangala dam.

New Hunter dam

Mr Rodney Tonkin advised that a new dam was planned for construction in the Hunter River catchment and sought clarification on the installation of a fishway at the dam and any future access arrangements for recreational fishing. Mr David Harasti advised that Mr Scott Carter, Conservation Manager at Port Stephens has been previously involved with this project. Mr Anthony Hurst advised that the relevant management authority should be approached with these requests as soon as possible to ensure they are addressed within any value management studies for the dam.

Action item

That the proposed new impoundment within the Hunter River catchment be discussed at the next Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing meeting on 14 December 2006.

Gaden Hatchery Hatching Shed

The Committee sought clarification on the progress of the hatching shed at Gaden Trout Hatchery. Cameron Westaway advised that tenders have been called for the construction of the shed and drainage system. The tender review and appointment process for the contract works is expected to be completed by Christmas.

Lake Albert study

NSW DPI advised that the final report of the Lake Albert study has been submitted. The report identifies a number of potential sources of water which could be used to fill the lake and the advantages and disadvantages as well as projected likely capital and operational costs to provide for these various options. Ms Debbie Lennon noted that the Wagga Wagga City Council had yet to determine which actions to implement and that long term water supply to the Lake has not yet been secured. Ms Lennon suggested that NSW DPI consider temporarily suspending the restocking program at the Lake, until such time as future water supply for the Lake is guaranteed.

Action

That NSW DPI write to Wagga City Council seeking clarification on the status of implementation of the Lake Albert Management Plan noting that the restocking program at the Lake may be discontinued unless future water supply to the Lake is guaranteed.

Payment Milestone Report – Manilla Hatchery

The Manilla Fishing Club has submitted a payment milestones report seeking funding for the second instalment of the hatchery pump foreshore stabilisation program, as the project has now been completed. The rock gabion below the pump site has been built and, the water / sediment diversion channel has been put in place and the area around the pump station has been rehabilitated. The Committee endorsed the second payment of \$1,500 to the Manilla Fishing Club, as per the existing funding agreement.

Didymo algae

Mr Rodney Tonkin advised that the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) now requires that all fishing gear from the South Island of New Zealand be declared before entry, to prevent the spread of Didymo algae into NSW waterways. Mr Tonkin sought clarification on how this requirement was being administered by AQIS at the shipping points of entry. Mr Tonkin asked if the NSW DPI Biosecurity Unit could investigate the inspection procedures applied by AQIS for Didymo on products entering Australia from overseas.

Fishway at Stevens Weir

Kevin McKinnon noted that the Murray Catchment Management Authority has funds available for the construction of a fish ladder at Stevens Weir near Denilquin. However, funding for the fishway will expire in June 2008. NSW DPI advised that Mr Adam Vey, Senior Conservation Manager at Albury is developing a business plan for the project to submit through the Murray Darling Basin Commission's budget process.

Action item

That NSW DPI discuss the installation of the proposed fishway at Stevens Weir with Mr Adam Vey and report back to the Committee at the April budget meeting.

DVD on expenditure of fishing licence fees

Mr John Diplock advised that a DVD on licence funded programs is being produced and a rock fishing safety segment will be included at the end of the Trust production. 200,000 copies of the DVD will be produced for distribution to the public. The DVD will run for approximately 15 minutes.

Next meeting

The next RFFTEC meeting is scheduled for Monday 2nd and Tuesday 3rd of April 2007 at the Cronulla Fisheries Centre.